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Summary record of the 7th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 6 October 2017, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Ramírez Carreño ..... (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 58: Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations (*continued*) (A/72/23 (chaps. V and XIII) and A/72/62)

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1. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria) said that the daily press releases often did not reflect the discussions that took place in the Committees and that a number of delegations, including that of Algeria, had flagged that issue in the past. When previously raised during an informal meeting on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, such divergences had been attributed to a lack of resources. However, in his view, that in no way accounted for the situation, exemplified in a recent press release which had purported to quote people who had not yet even addressed the Fourth Committee. Even if the inclusion of incorrect information was inadvertent, it was unjustifiable. A representative of the Department of Public Information must appear before the Committee to explain and apologize. The Department must publish a correction in such cases and, in the future, it had a responsibility to accurately disseminate the debates that took place within the bodies of the United Nations to the world press.

2. **The Chair** said that he agreed with Mr. Bessedik's comments and asked the Secretariat and the Department of Public Information to clarify what had happened and present an apology.

3. **The Secretary** apologized to the Committee on behalf of its secretariat. She said corrected press releases would be published later that day and the issue would be discussed further with the Department of Public Information.

4. **Mr. Navjot Kaur** (Young Progressives of America) said that building walls to keep people out instead of welcoming them in was unjust and cruel. Morocco had divided the Sahrawi people; nonetheless, they refused to accept the continued occupation and the daily violations of their human rights. When former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had visited the Territory, he had been moved by the anger of the people who had lived in the harshest conditions for over 40 years and felt the world had forgotten their cause. Indeed, the international community had failed to address the plight of the Sahrawi but there was hope that greater progress would be achieved under the new Secretary-General. Nevertheless, the absence of cooperation from Morocco, which said it wanted Western Sahara to be autonomous and yet controlled it with an iron fist, was concerning. She strongly urged the United Nations to bring that decades-long conflict to a peaceful resolution.

5. **Ms. Boaventura** (Justice for Western Sahara) said that the Sahrawi people lived in oppression, either in refugee camps in Algeria or in occupied territories. Morocco had constructed a large wall dividing Western Sahara from north to south which had become a "war zone", guarded by mines and armed guards; yet no country had acknowledged that there was a military occupation underway. Furthermore, in conducting business with Moroccan firms, many international companies were benefitting from access to natural resources illegally extracted from Western Sahara. The delay in holding a referendum only benefitted Morocco and its allies and the silence of other countries and the media revealed their own economic and geopolitical interests. It was imperative that the United Nations should end the illegal occupation and cultural segregation and assist the Sahrawi people in their pursuit of self-government.

6. **Ms. Baba Dih**, speaking in her personal capacity as a Sahrawi who was born in the refugee camps of Algeria and was currently a PhD student at New York University, said that even though nomadism was a central part of Sahrawi culture, her people still had a strong sense of being rooted in their Territory. Nevertheless, following the poorly managed decolonization, many of them tragically had to flee to

Algeria's Tindouf region where they still awaited a resolution. Morocco had established strict media control in the areas it occupied, to prevent the international community from becoming aware of the reality of the situation or intervening. In addition, the idea that the Territory was a fundamental part of Morocco was used to excuse police brutality against those who advocated the autonomy of Western Sahara. The international community should therefore stop listening passively to the demands of the Sahrawi people and ensure that the referendum for self-determination took place.

7. **Mr. Boukhari** (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente Polisario)) said that the continued occupation of Western Sahara was a blow to the credibility of the United Nations. Dozens of political prisoners were languishing in Moroccan jails as that country continued to plunder the Territory's natural resources while bringing drugs, instability and terrorism to the region. In 2016, Morocco had violated the terms of the ceasefire by trying to build a road in Guerguerat, which had almost led to armed confrontation. The Frente Polisario was firmly resolved to cooperate with the new Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara in his mission to reinitiate the peace process since the Frente Polisario, the United Nations and the African Union all agreed that the dispute related to decolonization and called for self-determination. It was crucial that MINURSO's referendum mandate should be completed in order to achieve a peace which would be of benefit to all.

8. **Mr. Arcia Vivas** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) asked for further details on the occupying Power's exploitation of natural resources in the Territory and how that would affect the future sustainability of Western Sahara.

9. **Ms. Scott** (Namibia), noting that her country contributed aid to the refugee camps, and that there had been accusations that aid was being sold instead of reaching the refugees, requested information on any measures in place to ensure that aid actually reached the refugees.

10. **Mr. Boukhari** (Frente Polisario) said that exploitation of natural resources constituted one of the main reasons for the occupation by Morocco and it was estimated that Morocco received between US$ 7 and US$ 12 billion per year in profits from the phosphate and fish resources of Western Sahara. At that rate, such natural resources faced complete exhaustion, and he urged all countries to refrain from becoming involved in the ransacking of his country.

11. There had been no official report by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) about any of the camps. The information referred to in that regard was false and originated only from a deputy (of the French National Assembly) and a woman who claimed to work for OLAF. If such claims were true, the Security Council would not have recently asked Member States to increase their financial aid.

12. **Mr. Laassel** (Morocco) speaking on a point of order, said that the Chair should not invite petitioners to address the Committee using a title, such as "ambassador", that had not been recognized by the United Nations.

13. **Ms. Madima** (South Africa) inquired how the referendum on self-determination would unfold.

14. **Mr. Kadyautumbe** (Zimbabwe) asked what Mr. Boukhari's expectations were in relation to the appointment of the new Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara.

15. **Mr. Boukhari** (Frente Polisario) replied that the referendum could easily be organized in the space of three months. The Personal Envoy, moreover, had great authority, but faced major difficulties since Morocco insisted on maintaining the status quo so that it could continue to occupy and exploit the Territory.

16. **Ms. Emhamed** (Sahrawi Student Union), speaking in her personal capacity as a Sahrawi student in Iowa, said that that despite having pursued a college education and a career in the United States, she remained dispirited about the plight of her people. It was regrettable to see that France, a permanent member of the Security Council, had consistently and blindly supported Morocco in the United Nations on the issue of Western Sahara. She called upon States to end the illegal Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara and to support the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination. Many Sahrawi protestors, including the Gdim Izik group, had been unjustly imprisoned. The Sahrawi, including those in refugee camps, were a very peaceful people and had no connection with terrorist acts such as those that had recently occurred in London, Paris and Barcelona. She urged France to reconsider its position towards Morocco regarding the issue of Western Sahara.

17. **Ms. Guest** (Artist for Kids Rights) said that a referendum on independence for Western Sahara had

been promised but not conducted, despite the ceasefire between Morocco and the Frente Polisario that had been brokered by the United Nations over 20 years prior. Morocco still controlled two thirds of the Territory of Western Sahara, including its entire Atlantic coastline.

18. Morocco had tried to bolster its claim to Western Sahara by working to alter the demographics of the Territory, offering financial incentives for Moroccans to move there and conversely, for Sahrawis to move to Morocco. Moreover, the Moroccan Government limited freedom of expression and assembly, as well as barring media coverage of sensitive topics and any challenges to its sovereignty over Western Sahara, thus leading to self-censorship. Security forces in the Territory had a history of human rights violations, including arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and disappearances that had been cited by Amnesty International.

19. In the 1980s, Morocco had constructed a 1,700 mile wall to divide the northwest Moroccan-occupied region of Western Sahara from the pro-independence Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, controlled by the Frente Polisario. Morocco had long exploited Western Sahara for its natural resources, including phosphate, iron ore, hydrocarbon reserves and fisheries. Foreign companies had been complicit in that exploitation and continued to pursue oil drilling prospects without concern for the largely impoverished local population. The international community must not be swayed by the interests of the occupying Power: the credibility of the United Nations was at stake in the decolonization of Western Sahara.

20. **Mr. Sassi** (S.K.C.), said that the legal status of Western Sahara had unambiguously been characterized as non-self-governing by the United Nations, and the colonial occupation of that Territory constituted one of the gravest violations of human rights. In 1975, the International Court of Justice had declared that Sahrawi people had the right to self-determination, overriding the claims of the occupying Power. A number of subsequent legal rulings and United Nations resolutions had confirmed the status of Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory. Despite re-joining the African Union alongside the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, the Moroccan military had nonetheless continued to occupy the region with impunity for over 40 years, systematically repressing the Sahrawi people, exploiting their natural resources and attempting to modify the region's demographic profile in its favour. Many Sahrawi men and women had been imprisoned merely for attempting to exercise their right to self-determination.

21. Morocco continued to prevent a visiting mission to Western Sahara by the Special Committee, and to refuse access to parliamentary delegations, journalists and international non-governmental organizations. A complicit silence reigned in the Security Council, which had been unable to hold Morocco accountable for its actions in Western Sahara. The Secretary-General and his new Personal Envoy must work to ensure the resumption of direct negotiations between Morocco and the Frente Polisario, which was the sole legitimate representative of the people of Western Sahara.

22. **Mr. Moraga Duque** (Rehabilitación y Esperanza) said that as a member of the generation that had survived the abuses of the Pinochet dictatorship, he was concerned about human rights violations in the Tindouf refugee camps. Human Rights Watch had observed that the Frente Polisario consistently marginalized those who questioned its authority, and isolated refugees from the outside world. By recognizing the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, some countries had in fact become complicit in the abuses committed in the camps, and continued to prevent a census from being carried out by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

23. Although the Frente Polisario was on record as firmly opposing slavery, it did little to eliminate residual slavery among the minority Black population in Tindouf, including the refusal to grant marriage licences to Black women without the approval of their so-called "owners".

24. He expressed surprise that the Chair had used the term "ambassador" to refer to an individual who was not recognized as such by the United Nations; he was moreover offended that the Chair, for ideological reasons, had remained silent in the face of the aforementioned grave human rights abuses.

25. **Ms. Riveros** (CPLATAM Observatory) said that although the question of Western Sahara continued to stagnate in the United Nations, the region itself was experiencing a major transformation, including a high rate of urbanization and the modernization of its infrastructure. The region had had the highest rate of participation in the 2016 legislative elections. The Moroccan population democratically elected its representatives by universal direct suffrage for

executive positions, while inhabitants voted for officials in charge of the administration and management of resources at the municipal, provincial and regional levels. The bicameral parliament consequently included Saharan representatives. A number of Saharans had also held public office as ministers and State secretaries. Like that of all other groups, the political participation of Saharans was guaranteed in Morocco regardless of political party or regional affiliation. Looking at the two previous legislative elections, one of the traditional political parties with influence in the Sahara had been displaced by an emerging political party, thus illustrating the democratic process. In fact, the political preferences expressed by voters in the Sahara continued to change as an originally nomadic population settled and began to recognize democratic processes.

26. It was estimated by a former Frente Polisario member that over 3,150 Saharans were serving as political representatives across the three administrative regions of the Sahara, proportionally to their relative population size. The Moroccan administration in Western Sahara had implemented democratic mechanisms that allowed for the real political representation of Saharans, in contrast to the totalitarian structure of the Frente Polisario which former members had recognized was incompatible with democracy, freedom and human rights. The Frente Polisario claimed to represent all Saharans, ignoring that the majority of the Saharan population did not fall under its control, but enjoyed democratic representation and participation in the Kingdom of Morocco.

27. **Mr. Tamek**, speaking in his personal capacity as a member of the Moroccan Parliament, said that the fundamentally erroneous positions espoused by many petitioners reflected their ignorance of the history of Morocco, of which the Moroccan Sahara was an integral part. Before becoming a protectorate in 1912, Morocco had been the only independent, sovereign State with recognized international borders in Northwest Africa, a status it had possessed for centuries. The country had been carved up at the Algeciras Conference in 1906 by the major colonial Powers, each of which had sought its share of Morocco as a result of its valuable geostrategic location. France had seized the central part of Morocco, Spain had occupied the north, the Sahara and pockets of Tarfaya and Sidi Ifni north of the Sahara, and the city of Tangiers had been declared an international zone. The country's independence would come in stages, with France withdrawing in 1955 and Spain leaving Tarfaya in 1958, Sidi Ifni in 1969 and finally, the Sahara in 1975. However, no one had demanded that a referendum leading to independence be held for any region apart from the Sahara. That region had been treated differently because it had borders with a neighbouring country whose interference had been the sole reason for the existence of a Saharan question in the first place. That State persisted in its flagrant meddling in the Saharan question out of an ambition to gain an entry point onto the Atlantic Ocean, something it would never achieve.

28. **Ms. Mohamedlamin Salam** (NOVA, Western Sahara), speaking in her personal capacity as someone who had been born in the camps of Western Sahara, said that the people of Western Sahara were paying a great price for their commitment to peace. The great potential of young people in Western Sahara was being sacrificed in the camps. Every year, the people of Western Sahara came to the Fourth Committee to generate hope but had to swallow their anger when nothing changed.

29. Peaceful protestors did not deserve to be beaten and tortured by the Moroccan police simply for exercising their right to self-determination. Human rights violations in Western Sahara were concealed by Morocco, which prevented human rights monitoring from taking place in the Territory. Violations had repeatedly been reported by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. She asked why France, a democratic country, consistently used its veto power to prevent human rights monitoring in Western Sahara.

30. Her people's fight was a fight for dignity. Only the Sahrawi people had the right to choose their future. The only way to end the dispute was to allow the Sahrawi people to vote.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.